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SUBJECT: CARTOON ANNIVERSARY: DANISH PAPER DECIDES AGAINST  
REPRINTING MOHAMMED DRAWINGS

Classified By: Ambassador James P. Cain, reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: To mark the one-year anniversary this weekend of its publication of Mohammed cartoons, the Danish daily "Jyllands-Posten" weighed, but ultimately decided against reprinting the caricatures, at least so soon after the controversy stirred by the Pope's speech. Our discreet discussions with the paper and with senior Danish government officials underscore both how close we came to another potential crisis and how much the defense of free speech and domestic political calculations remain paramount for the government and for many Danes. End summary.

Another Cartoon Crisis Averted  
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¶2. (S/NF) Post's public affairs counselor learned from a "Jyllands-Posten" journalist (strictly protect) last week that the paper was considering several options to commemorate the cartoons' first anniversary September 30, including re-publishing the original cartoons or running new ones on the subject. The paper's fiery cultural editor, Flemming Rose, had recently resumed his job, after several months in the U.S., and was reportedly pushing for re-publication. The Ambassador called Prime Minister Rasmussen's national security advisor, Bo Lidegaard, to ask if this was true and to find out how the government was going to handle the issue. If we believed the paper was going to re-publish the cartoons, the Ambassador stressed, we would need to notify our government and help prepare our embassies around the world for possible reaction. Lidegaard was clearly surprised by the question, stunned that the paper would consider such provocation.

¶3. (S/NF) In a subsequent conversation with the Ambassador September 26, Lidegaard confirmed that "Jyllands-Posten" was weighing a second run of the cartoons but indicated that the government did not want to get directly involved in the matter. So sensitive was the issue, Lidegaard told the Ambassador confidentially, that the prime minister's office had made a conscious decision not to alert the foreign ministry or the intelligence services. (RAO's sounding of a senior intelligence official days earlier suggested that the service was not paying any attention to the looming anniversary.) Furthermore, Lidegaard explicitly warned against any attempt by us to openly influence the paper's decision, which, if made public, the prime minister would have to condemn, he said. Lidegaard agreed, however, that no harm would come from a straightforward query from us to "Jyllands-Posten" about their plans.

¶4. (S/NF) With that, the Ambassador telephoned "Jyllands-Posten" editor-in-chief Carsten Juste, and asked straight out about his paper's intentions for commemorating

the anniversary. Juste told the Ambassador that he and his team had been considering re-publication, but concluded that such a move would be unwise, especially so soon after the controversy caused by the Pope's Regensburg remarks. The Ambassador welcomed this news, noting that none of us wanted a repeat of the crisis earlier this year. Lidegaard was demonstrably relieved when the Ambassador reported this exchange a short time later.

How Could It Happen Again?

15. (C) For all the shock of the cartoon crisis and Denmark's heightened sensitivity to the Islamic world's concerns and the challenges of better integrating its own 200,000-strong Muslim population, there are still a lot of Danes who welcome confrontation with those they consider extremists and oppose any sign of retreat on core values such as free speech. The anti-immigration Danish People's Party, which votes with the government coalition, may be the most vocal on the subject (as well as the party that gained the most politically from the crisis). There are also many within the governing Liberal and Conservative parties who remain highly motivated in defense of free speech and Western culture. More broadly, Danes are conflicted, if not divided, recognizing the challenges posed by radical Islam to traditional Danish values but holding fast to their image of themselves as committed to tolerance and multiculturalism.

16. (C) In the wake of the cartoon crisis, free speech has become, more than ever before, a "third rail" issue in Danish politics. Even the government's principal rivals cannot bring themselves to fault the prime minister for more than tactical missteps in his handling of the crisis, while Rasmussen himself remains convinced that a firm, no-concessions approach in defense of free speech is the

winning course. A poll published September 28 shows that a year later, despite the worldwide violence attributed to their publication, 46.7 percent of Danes support the original decision to publish the cartoons. A popular book published earlier this month, "Islamists and Naivists," written by two prominent Danish commentators, sees the cartoon crisis as part of the overall threat to Western values from Islamic radicalism. PM Rasmussen continues to view the cartoon issue first and foremost as a domestic political issue, certainly more aware of the international implications but no more inclined to put them before the reaction at home.

17. (C/NF) When, then, the newspaper that ignited Denmark's worst foreign policy crisis in sixty years essentially threatened to do it all over again, the prime minister apparently concluded that the potential costs of being seen to intervene against free speech outweighed even the risk of another uproar. The Danish government might not have been able to dissuade the paper's editors in any case; one could also argue that another such provocation is inevitable. It seems clear from this episode, though, that Rasmussen's first priority was to stay on the right side of the free speech issue and avoid any suggestion of concession.

Comment

18. (C/NF) Comment: This episode illustrates that the Danes have drawn mixed lessons from their experience in the cartoon crisis. These lessons have positive and negative implications for the U.S. On the good side, the Danes have stepped up engagement in promotion of democracy and reform abroad, especially in the Middle East. They now recognize the need to improve integration and outreach to the country's immigrant communities. Since the cartoon crisis, they have extended troop mandates in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the negative side, though, this popular center-right government has hardened its views on the absolute primacy of free speech. The prime minister appeared willing to let Jyllands-Posten dictate the timing of the next Islam vs. West confrontation without question or open discussion within the

government. While this particularly vulnerable moment of the cartoon anniversary may pass without violence, our discussions this past week remind us that the Danish front in what they see as a clash of civilizations could reopen at any time.

CAIN